



North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation

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Pat McCrory
Governor

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John E. Skvarla, III
Secretary, DENR

OUTDOOR NATION COMES TO NC

It's a simple idea really.

If you're looking for ideas to connect young people with the outdoors, you need to ask the young people. That's the concept behind Outdoor Nation, which will hold one of three national summits this year at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area and UNC-Chapel Hill.

North Carolina's state parks system is helping to host the gathering of about 150 mil-

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NEW RANGERS

JOHN SKVARLA, SECRETARY OF THE N.C. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES, ADDRESSES NEW PARK RANGERS AS THEY RECEIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMISSIONS. DETAILS PAGE 12.



WALKERS ENJOY NEW PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE ON CLAYTON'S MST LINK.

PARTNERSHIPS YIELD NEW MST SUCCESSES

The speaker list was a tad long at a dedication in April of the River Walk on the Neuse trail in Clayton, but that was right and proper. Every level of government made a significant contribution to the trail project that has been formally accepted as a link in the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail.

The trail that Clayton began planning more than 10 years ago was created with a mix of town, state and federal expertise and funds, and involved the town's recreation department, the state parks

system and the state DOT.

"The example you are setting is statewide and national. Everybody that could and would, did," U.S. Rep. Mike McIntyre said minutes before a ribbon of natural vine was cut on four-miles of paved greenway alongside the river. At one point the trail crosses the Neuse on a 70-foot, steel-span bridge.

Clayton bought the land for the trailhead a few years ago, using a \$300,000 grant from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund as seed

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Department of Environment and Natural Resources

NEW PARK CAPITAL PROJECTS APPROVED

The N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority approved \$745,000 for capital projects in three state parks and the reallocation of funds to support land acquisitions. The board met March 15 at Merchants Millpond State Park in

Gates County.

Authority members agreed to fund tent and boat-in camping facilities at Lake James State Park in Burke and McDowell Counties. The project includes the design of 35 tent-only campsites, a bath-

house serving the tent camping loop, a gravel access road and 30 primitive, boat-in campsites to be built by park staff along the shoreline.

The authority also provided funding for an exhibit pavilion at Fort Macon State Park in Carteret County and a master plan for the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail, a continuous, off-road trail from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park.

The trail is a unit of the state parks system, but on the ground it is a partnership among the towns, counties, federal and state landowners and volunteer groups along the trail route. The distance is approximately 1,000 miles, with 530 miles completed. Detailed planning is needed for the remaining 470 miles.

The board also approved land acquisition projects at Chimney Rock, Eno River, New River and Grandfather Mountain state parks.

Division Director Lewis Ledford provided an update on the state parks system's efforts and the new leadership team in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. He highlighted a recent conference held by Friends of State Parks, which brought support groups from across the state to focus on collaboration, fundraising and strategic planning. Ledford called it "a very successful meeting," with representation from 30 local friends groups.

Linda Peterson of the Albemarle Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. described recent partnership projects that benefit-

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From The Director's Desk

Our friends will readily recognize the three core components of the state parks system's mission – conservation, recreation and education. But, there is much else that goes on in the state parks day-to-day. Recent events have reminded us of the diversity within our overall mission.

Diversity was explored in detail when Weymouth Woods State Historic Preserve held its first-ever bioblitz this month. The inventory by seasoned biologists, and assisted by park visitors, added to our knowledge about the park. Several hundred species of plants, animals and insects were recorded in a single day. We sometimes forget that important research goes on daily in our state parks by universities, other state agencies and our own staff. We have many partners in this effort throughout the nation.

The state parks are also places where careers are fashioned. We note the retirements of four senior park rangers – Wade Stubbs, Grant Gibson, Allen Rogers and Paul Bailey – who together contributed about 120 years of service to the state and its citizens. That's an amazing contribution by dedicated people who will be sorely missed. At the same time, we've accepted 10 new rangers into our family who were sworn as law enforcement officers this month. They bring many talents and much training, but they have quite a legacy to match. We extend special thanks to Judge R. Allen Baddour, Secretary John Skvarla and Assistant Secretary Brad Ives for sharing perspectives and guidance in their comments during the commissioning.

And, the state parks can also be places for personal challenges. We've all been entranced by the effort of blind hiker Trevor Thomas who is tackling a through-hike of the entire 1,000-mile Mountains-to-Sea State Trail. His dedication to bringing attention to this recreational gem in the state parks system is yet another inspiration to us as well as to our state park friends.

June is always a busy month in parks—from National Trails Day to National Get Outdoors Day. The Great American Backyard Campout is June 22. And June 29-30, Jordan Lake State Recreation Area and UNC-Chapel Hill will be venues for one of three national Outdoor Nation summits, when millennials (generally ages 16-28) will gather to exchange ideas and submit ideas for grants for outdoor initiatives. Governor McCrory has proclaimed June as Great Outdoors Month. Read more details about all of these activities on www.ncparks.gov. There's no place better to enjoy and learn about nature than in a North Carolina state park!

Sincerely,



Lewis Ledford

LUMBER RIVER ACCESS GETS NEW TRAIL

A new trail segment now winds through the black-water wetlands and laurel thickets of the Chalk Banks Access of Lumber River State Park in Scotland County, thanks to a local grant and the hard work of park employees.

The 1.5-mile Laurel Loop Trail was dedicated in March with the first hikers ignoring a cold rain to enjoy the view.

The segment connects with an existing trail to complete a loop, and Chalk Banks now boasts five miles of single-track trail, offering an experience of both woodlands thick with mountain laurel as well as riverbank views.

Although the bulk of the 9,268-acre state park is in Robeson and Columbus counties, the residents of Scotland County were quick to adopt the Chalk Banks Access several miles upstream.

The access was opened in 2005 with campsites, picnic grounds and paddling access, after the county helped acquire



A CHILLY RAINY DAY COULDN'T KEEP VISITORS FROM EXPLORING THE NEW TRAIL AT THE CHALK BANK ACCESS OF LUMBER RIVER STATE PARK.

the land and the town of Wa-gram extended utility lines to the site.

Although park staff provided most of the labor for the trail project, funds were provided locally through a SPARK-PLUG grant – supported in turn by the N.C. Recreation and Park Association, the N.C. Council of Churches, the N.C.

PTA, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems and the Blue Cross-Blue Shield Foundation of N.C.

SPARKPLUG projects have focused on new recreation opportunities and healthy lifestyles, and have included a new farmer's market, community gardens and development of exercise/dance programs.

TRUST FUND

ted several state parks. The nonprofit organization helps community groups and local governments in northeastern North Carolina develop projects that protect natural and human resources while promoting economic development.

The council sponsored a project in partnership with the park to build three raised camping platforms and three primitive campsites along Bennett's Creek, which begins at the lower end of Merchants Millpond and meanders 22 miles to the Chowan River.

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PARK SUPT. JAY GREENWOOD, RIGHT, GIVES A TOUR OF THE VISITOR CENTER AND ITS EXHIBITS AT MERCHANTS MILLPOND STATE PARK.

BIOBLITZ!

TONY DeSANTIS, A RANGER FROM DISMAL SWAMP STATE PARK, TAKES PART IN THE BIOBLITZ ON HIS DAY OFF, TRACKING DOWN INSECTS.



WEYMOUTH WOODS EXAMINES DIVERSITY

It was equal parts research, interpretive program and celebration of biodiversity called Bioblitz at Weymouth Woods State Nature Preserve.

It was a sort of species-palooza that added to scientific knowledge about the state park on a Saturday in May as researchers from across the state, rangers, teachers, students and volunteers converged in the wetlands, longleaf stands and hardwood forests to see just how many species they could identify in one day.

It'll be weeks before a firm number is tallied as researchers review their findings, but at least several hundred distinct species were found. In most cases, that number will overlap the 1,976 species inventoried at the park over the decades, but some "new" species are sure to be added.

"The enthusiasm was great. The intensity at eight o'clock when it was time to start was palpable," said Ed Co-

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A NEWLY BANDED WARBLER POSES FOR PARK VISITORS AND VOLUNTEERS



ABOVE, PARK SUPT. SCOTT HARTLEY, RIGHT, LEADS A BIRDING HIKE DURING THE EVENT. AT RIGHT, A PARK VISITOR HOLDS A HOGNOSE SNAKE THAT WAS LATER RETURNED TO THE WILD.



NEW VIEW OF MOUNTAIN PARK REVEALED

One of the most spectacular settings for future state park development is cautiously being opened for limited public use at South Mountains State Park. The Clear Creek Watershed area of the park, at more than 3,000 acres, offers visitors a panorama unparalleled in the foothills and inspiration about possibilities.

On a recent Sunday, 11 visitors joined Ranger Amanda Lasley for a brief canoe hike on the 20-acre lake that is a scenic entryway to the tract. This followed a workday in which volunteers cleared brush from potential trail and public areas and built new visitor benches along the shoreline.

There are no official trails on the property, but local visitors are welcome to walk the lakeshore, fish, picnic or carry in canoes and kayaks. Parking is extremely limited, but the park staff hopes to gradually expand a gravel lot.

In 2000, the Department of Agriculture transferred 2,556 acres then known as the Broughton Watershed to the state parks system. The property lies at the western edge of the state park next to public gamelands and has relatively easy access from Interstate 40 and Morganton.

The addition made South Mountains State Park the largest in North Carolina at more than 18,000 acres.

In 2007, an adjoining 454-acre tract was accepted from the Division of Health and Human Services. The two tracts – now called the Clear Creek Watershed – have been protected since the early 1970s and sweep from a paved state road



A RECENT 'CANOE HIKE' ALLOWED VISITORS TO EXPLORE CLEAR CREEK.

to the top of a commanding ridge that looks onto the Blue Ridge and the Black Mountains to the west.

Recently, the lake's dam was repaired allowing a 10-foot increase in the water level. Above the lake and gently rolling land, the watershed features rugged

outcrops and rare species.

The state park's master plan envisions this as the setting for the parks system's western environmental education center – to augment existing ones at Haw River and Goose Creek state parks.

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FISHING IS A POPULAR ACTIVITY IN THE AREA'S 20-ACRE MANMADE LAKE.

SOUTH MOUNTAINS

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A learning center and group overnight facilities would be built with special attention to design for populations with special needs (considering the site's history serving these populations).

Surrounding the center will be a network of trails, picnic areas, a play field, canoe launch, fishing pier, boathouse and primitive camping opportunities.

Even for inexperienced paddlers, the small lake offers just a mild challenge. But, the landscape revealing itself certainly challenges the imagination.



PADDLER WATCHES FOR WILDLIFE IN CLEAR CREEK WATERSHED ACCESS.

BIOBLITZ

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

rey, inventory biologist for the state parks system, who helped Park Superintendent Scott Hartley organize the event.

Several dozen volunteers arrived and alongside professionals, fanned out with specific targets in mind. Teams banded birds, photographed insects, netted moths and butterflies, snatched reptiles and amphibians and, wielding field guides, tussled over plant identification.

Woven into the event were interpretive programs and hikes for visitors.

Taking inventory of species, both rare and common, is an important part of managing state parks. To make good decisions on managing the land and placing facilities, it's important to know what species live in a park – and exactly where they live.

There's always a background level of species inventory in the parks. That's part of the job of the parks system's team of biologists. And, rangers contribute to the inventory as they have opportunity. Results (and photos) are entered into an online database.

Hartley is an especially proficient naturalist in a park with an impressive array of habitats, and Bioblitz likely helped him pass a personal goal of tagging 2,000 species before his retirement later this year.

Corey said the success of Bioblitz suggests carrying the idea to other parks in coming years. Also expanding the effort to hold events in the fall would be valuable since some different species may be catalogued then.



NATURALIST SUSAN CAMPBELL EXPLAINS HOW WILD BIRDS ARE NETTED FOR BANDING.



RESEARCHER RETURNS TO THE VISITOR CENTER WITH CAPTURED COTTONMOUTH WATER MOCCASIN.

PARKS AWARDED FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Rangers and other employees in the state parks are always searching...and not necessarily for plants, animals or lost hikers. There is a lot of searching for better, more efficient and more environmentally friendly ways of doing things.

State parks are all about education, and as part of that, they take pride in setting a standard for environmental sustainability...in other words, to teach by example. A byproduct of this experimentation is that two state parks and one employee recently captured important sustainability awards from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Fort Macon and New River state parks were honored with first and second place group awards, respectively, and maintenance mechanic John Schell at Fort Macon was a second place winner for individual effort.

The initiatives involved energy-saving ideas inside visitor centers, saving gasoline, saving propane fuel and reducing beach litter. They would've been tried in the state parks with or without the DENR awards program, but the recognition is appreciated.

Through the awards program the state parks system is building a legacy of sustainability, with the Division of Parks and Recreation as a whole winning the top group award in 2012.

Fort Macon State Park won first place for group effort with a two-pronged approach to keeping its beaches cleaner. A new "Pack It In/Pack It Out" campaign has convinced visi-



BRAD IVES, LEFT, ASSISTANT DENR SECRETARY, PRESENTED SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS TO GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING FORT MACON AND NEW RIVER STATE PARKS AND EMPLOYEE JOHN SCHELL.

tors to carry refuse to containers near parking areas rather than using containers on the beach.

This keeps trash from blowing into the dunes areas and eliminates gasoline-fueled trips onto the beach to empty containers. And for most purposes, the park has begun to use bicycles to patrol beach areas and parking lots.

At New River State Park, the staff created a sustainability panel that first requested a state energy audit and set aside "action days" to act on the recommendations – for instance, adjusting door seals and air vents, programming thermostats and examining schedules to reduce gasoline use.

The park used a \$2,000 gift from Friends of High Country State Parks to replace inefficient light fixtures with LED units and install motion sensors to reduce lighting re-

quirements.

Schell's idea that captured the individual award was to closely monitor humidity levels in the park buildings so that less propane is used to heat cooler air brought into the buildings in warm-weather months. The idea cut propane use by 70 percent at an annual savings of more than \$6,000.

There were other ideas that received attention in the awards program. Ranger Mary Smith at Gorges State Park was recognized for helping fourth and fifth graders at a nearby elementary school begin a "Recycling Buddies" program and combining their aluminum recycling efforts with those of the park.

And, Gorges State Park was nominated for substantial cuts in water and electricity use at its new visitor center, completed last year under the LEED program of the U.S. Green Building Council.

MST SEGMENT

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money and built a parking area and other infrastructure on Old Covered Bridge Road.

The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation secured a key, 329-acre tract four miles north at the Wake-Johnston county line with funding from the Parks and Recreation and Clean Water Management trust funds. That property, with its 1.6 miles of river frontage, will be managed by Clayton under a unique lease agreement.

The state DOT arranged for engineering and much of the construction of the bridge and the trail itself, using federal funding.

Clayton's trail segment will very soon connect with Raleigh's contribution to the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail – a greenway stretching from the Wake-Johnston line north to the Falls Lake Dam. Within a few years, the greater trail will be complete from Clayton northwest to Hillsborough, a distance of about 100 miles.

Brad Ives, assistant secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said contributions from towns such as Clayton become part of a much larger vision for North Carolina – the



CLAYTON OFFICIAL STACY BEARD, CENTER, TALKS WITH (FROM LEFT) CAROL TINGLEY, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION, BRAD IVES, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES, LEWIS LEDFORD, STATE PARKS DIRECTOR, AND DOT SECRETARY TONY TATA.

1,000-mile cross-state trail launched in 1977 by Howard Lee, former head of the environmental agency.

Ives told the crowd, "Thank you for being here so we can see part of the realization of Howard Lee's dream and vision, and thank you for being part of that."

Slightly more than half of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail has been built as dedi-

cated walking/biking path, and much of that is on federal or state conservation lands including state parks. The remainder is routed along rural roads.

Lewis Ledford, state parks director, said, "These state parks and these trails, we find, are economic engines in the communities where they're located. We can make this trail happen; let's make sure we make this happen."

OUTDOOR NATION

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lennials (generally regarded as youths ages 16-28). The summit is June 29-30.

It's a great idea for the "delegates" – young people who attend either as individuals or in groups. All expenses are paid (excepting transportation); there are outdoor activities and opportunities for project grants; and, there's time to network with outdoor profes-

sionals.

Each year, Outdoor Nation sponsors three national summits and these are augmented with follow-up gatherings in successive years. Outdoor Nation is an action program of the Outdoor Foundation, a nonprofit of the outdoor recreation industry – with members such as The North Face, REI, The Conservation

Fund, Merrell, American's State Parks, the National Park Service, and others.

Outdoor Nation Director Ivan Levin put it this way, "During the summits, we all get together, discuss the things that are important to Outdoor Nation, learn from each other and come up with ideas to overcome the challenges young people face getting outdoors."

BLIND HIKER TACKLES MST CHALLENGE

On one of his more memorable hikes, Trevor Thomas, by his own count, fell more than 3,000 times, suffered four broken ribs and visited seven hospitals (and one veterinary clinic when a hospital couldn't be found).

At the end of it all, Thomas became the first blind hiker to complete an uninterrupted, solo hike of the 2,175-mile Appalachian Trail. Accompanied by his guide dog Tennille, he recently passed the halfway mark in another daunting journey – roughly 1,000 miles on the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail.

This latest expedition, which began April 1, is special to Thomas, who lives in Charlotte and firmly believes the MST – a unit of the state parks system – is a North Carolina gem that should get more attention and support that he hopes to attract with his effort.

The state parks system is supporting Thomas' hike, following his progress in social media from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park.

Thomas' principal corporate sponsor is THORLO, a Statesville-based athletic wear company, and he's getting support from Guide Dogs for the Blind, Ahnu, Big Agnes, ExOfficio and Marmot.

In 2004, a rare degenerative eye disease started taking Thomas sight. It was nearly four years before he began finding his way again, so to speak.

In an interview with Blue Ridge Magazine, he recounted, "In my sighted life, I was always into extreme sports – from backcountry skiing and mountain biking to parachuting. When I was going blind, those things kept being taken away from me. It felt like my world was getting smaller, and that caused a good bit of depression. Then, one of my friends took me to see Erik Weihe, a blind hiker. He's the first blind guy to climb Everest, and he had a similar eye disease. I decided that if he could do Everest, I could do something too."

After the Appalachian Trail, Thomas summited Mount Mitchell in 2009 and then Mount Whitney in 2010. He completed the challenging 2,654-mile Pacific Crest Trail and the Tahoe Rim Trail as part of team efforts.

The Mountains-to-Sea State Trail presents unique challenges, Thomas said. Just over half the route is on single-track trail with the remain-



THOMAS AND TENNILLE CROSS MOUNT MITCHELL. der – in parts of the piedmont and the eastern plain – charted along rural roads.

Technology makes it possible, he said. For navigation, a friend emails him trail details, and Thomas' iPhone speaks the directions aloud.

Also making it possible is the two-year-old black Labrador, Tennille. She's trained to keep Thomas from harm along roadsides, although she's picked up backcountry skills as well, learning to spot and stop at trail markers and hazards.

Thomas said the first few weeks alone on the MST through mountainous terrain were challenging, with few fellow hikers who might help with information (and company), many fallen trees, heavy rains and some very cold nights due to a late spring.

Thomas traversed Mount Mitchell State Park with rangers' help April 24 and relied on a longtime hiking buddy to help him through Linville Gorge and its stream crossings. Members of Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail have also been trail guides and given him rides off-trail to lodging.

Aside from the challenge, hiking blind has yielded its own rewards, Thomas said. "When I summit a mountain, I think it's actually better for me than someone who is sighted. For most people, hiking a summit is 90 percent visual," he said.

"But I remember the smells. I remember the sun hitting my face. Was it a warm day? Cold? Misty? All of that I bring into the experience, so I think actually a summit for me is more valuable than for someone who can see."

FRIENDS FOCUS ON COLLABORATION

Collaboration, fundraising and strategic planning were among objectives examined during the second-ever statewide conference of the Friends of State Parks (FSP) in February in Raleigh.

Members of the park support group as well as leaders of friends groups dedicated to specific state parks heard 14 speakers on a broad range of topics along with brief addresses by Brad Ives, assistant secretary for natural resources in the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, N.C. House Speaker Thom Tillis and N.C. Senate Majority Leader Harry Brown.

It was an opportunity for supporters of individual parks, FSP members, park advisory committee representatives and state parks administrators to exchange ideas on broadening support for the mission of the agency.

FSP President David Pearson moderated the event, including a panel discussion on "Fundraising and Attracting Volunteers." State Parks Director Lewis Ledford gave an update on parks system activities in advance of the centennial of the system in 2016.

And, a session on strategic planning was held by Nancy Walters, a retired U.S. Forest Service administrator who helped form Friends of Chimney Rock.

During a legislative reception, Tillis told the attendees that the best message for bolstering state parks support is to convince people to visit, "because when you learn



FSP PRESIDENT DAVID PEARSON OPENS THE STATEWIDE CONFERENCE.

them, you love them."

"I thank you for all you do," Tillis said. "Make no mistake about it, our state parks are like public safety, like so many other things that we really treasure. We know we have to do everything we can to help you and support you."

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Friends of State Parks, which held its first statewide conference in 2011 at Nag's Head. In recent years, FSP has grown dramatically and begun active support of such programs as Junior Ranger and YIP-EE, an effort

to sponsor school field trips to state parks.

The organization has also helped with the launch of 11 park-specific friends groups in the past three years.

"We are proud to promote positive recreational use of parklands, advocate for new contributions of land and resources to the system, lobby against any actions deemed potentially damaging to the natural character of parks and support the educational programs about the natural features of the parks," Pearson said.

FSP TARGETS FIELD TRIPS

Fewer and fewer youngsters are able to make a field trip to a state park during their early school years, even parks close by their schools. There are many educational pressures that contribute to this, but a survey of more than 800 teachers by the state Office of Environmental Education revealed that a lack of funds is the principle reason.

When invited, park

rangers will eagerly take interpretive programs into classrooms, but there's no good substitute for a walk with a ranger on the trail and the outdoor experience of a state park. Valuable lessons and often a life-long love of nature and conservation can begin that way.

Friends of State Parks (FSP) is tackling this issue at

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FSP YIPPEE

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a basic level with its YIP-EE program (Youth in Parks-Environmental Education) that makes mini-grants to any park friends group willing to work with local public schools to get kids outdoors.

The grants provide up to \$400 to pay for transportation and healthy snacks (the ranger programs are always free). The funds come from a memorial fund in the name of John E. Graham, a beloved former FSP stalwart.

Last April, FSP began its effort with a pilot program involving Eno River State Park, the Eno River Association and Lakewood Elementary School, an inner-city school in Durham. The effort brought groups of fifth graders into the park for a day of exploration and discovery.

Most recently, such a



YIPPEE PROGRAM AT ENO RIVER STATE PARK FITS SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

grant was awarded to Friends of Gorges and Brevard Middle School. As a result, 200 seventh graders will soon visit Gorges State Park for an exciting

“Survival Day” program.

Read more about the innovative program and about how to contribute at www.ncfsp.org



CARVERS CREEK VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEERS HAVE BEEN WORKING TWICE A MONTH TO READY CARVERS CREEK STATE PARK FOR OPENING THIS SUMMER, REMOVING FENCES, BRUSH AND REMNANTS OF FARM OPERATIONS. AT LOWER RIGHT IS THE PAVILION AND MILL LEFT INTACT ON THE LONG VALLEY FARM PORTION OF THE PARK.



TEN RANGERS RECEIVE COMMISSIONS

Ten new state park rangers received commissions as law enforcement officers Monday. The rangers were sworn in by Superior Court Judge R. Allen Baddour, Jr. at a special ceremony at William B. Umstead State Park.

Receiving a commission as a Special Peace Officer at the end of 17-week basic law enforcement training is generally regarded as the last formal step before a ranger takes on full duties in a unit of the state parks system. During the training period prior to commissioning, a ranger is assimilated into the park and begins assuming duties in resource management and visitor service.

John Skvarla, secretary, and Brad Ives, assistant secretary, of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, attended the ceremony and spoke briefly to the rangers and family members who attended.

Skvarla said rangers are on the front lines, not only in law enforcement, but in the area of customer service, and he noted that the state parks system has a \$400 million annual impact on the state's economy. "We need to do everything we can to help you enhance that economic impact," he said.

Baddour gave the new rangers some advice for dealing with the court system, and said that rangers and the parks they serve deserve support. "Anything we can do to make the parks more user friendly, more accessible, more inviting and more utilized as a resource, we should do," he said.

Several of the rangers earned accolades during their basic law enforcement training at various schools in the state. Michael Joseph



RANGERS ARE SWORN UNDER THE DIRECTION OF SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE R. ALLEN BADDOUR, JR.

Walker was named the most outstanding student in his class. Jason Howard and Ben Fleming captured top academic honors, and Jason Murvine won physical fitness honors in his class.

"It requires a lot of dedication and training for our candidates to earn the right to wear the campaign-style hat of a state park ranger," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "These men and women are true multi-specialists who are frequently asked to assume many roles during a day at work from finding a lost hiker to giving an interpretive program to dealing with violations of state law"

State park rangers are required to have at least a two-year degree, and many come to the job with four-year university degrees in curricula related to resource and/or park management. Beyond law enforcement training, all are trained in medical first response, search-and-rescue, wild-fire suppression, natural resource management, interpretive skills and environmental education.

The rangers who received commissions are: Benjamin Ryan Fleming at Fort Macon State Park; Jason Woodward Howard at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area; David Matthew Langdon at Falls Lake State Recreation Area; Crystal Nicole Lloyd at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park; Elliot Kevin McDowell at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area; Jason Bryant Murvine at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area; Katherine Leigh Goodman Scheip at Falls Lake State Recreation Area; Michael Joseph Walker at Lake Norman State Park; Michael Talbot Walker at Goose Creek State Park; and, Ian Jacob Willms at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area.



JUDGE R. ALLEN BADDOUR, JR. READS THE OATH OF SERVICE TO COMMISSION THE RANGERS.

CAREERS TOTAL 120 YEARS EXPERIENCE

Four state park rangers with combined experience totaling nearly 120 years, have left the state parks system within the past year.

The retirements of Wade Stubbs, Grant Gibson, Allen Rogers and Paul Bailey are yet another sign that the stewardship of the parks system is changing hands. Most of the park superintendents and senior rangers who joined the system in a 1970s growth period have now retired.

In just over a decade, every park has seen the emergence of a new superintendent (with the exception of Weymouth Woods Nature Historic Preserve where Supt. Scott Hartley is scheduled to retire this summer).

"These rangers have demonstrated a true dedication and passion for the state parks mission throughout their career," said Mike Lambert, chief of operations. "They each had the unique ability to excel in every aspect of a ranger's job including interpretation, law enforcement, resource management and maintenance and operations. Our park visitors and our state parks system have benefited from the professionalism and dedica-

tion of these talented rangers."

The breadth of experience of the retiring rangers is a bit staggering.

Stubbs, who left South Mountains State Park in mid-2012, had experience at Mount Mitchell State Park as a seasonal employee, before becoming a ranger in 1982 and serving at Morrow Mountain before locating to South Mountains in 2001.

He's a native of nearby Shelby who graduated in 1980 from North Carolina State University with a bachelor's degree in recreation resource administration.

Gibson, a native of Winston-Salem, graduated from NCSU in the same program in 1982. He retired from Jordan Lake State Recreation Area in February after serving in that park since 1987 – except for a three-year stint at Crowders Mountain State Park.

Before joining the state parks system fulltime, Gibson had already gathered experience with the US Army Corps of Engineers, at a

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WADE STUBBS, LEFT, SERVED AT THREE STATE PARKS.



GRANT GIBSON SERVED AT JORDAN LAKE SINCE 1987.



PAUL BAILEY, LEFT, JOINED NEW RIVER IN 1988.



ALLEN ROGERS, LEFT, SOUTH MOUNTAINS STALWART.

LAKE JAMES OPENS TWO NEW TRAILS

On Earth Day in April, Lake James State Park had reason to celebrate. With a group of hikers lead by Park Superintendent Nora Coffey, the park officially opened a new trail segment to be incorporated into the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVNHT).

For youngsters, the park also presented a “sneak peek” of its Holly Discovery Trail which was dedicated June 3 bringing hands-on nature exhibits into the outdoors.

The Overmountain trail project completes a modest two-mile segment within the park, but it’s also a critical link in the park’s integration with a regional trail and recreation system in Burke and McDowell counties and beyond.

The greater OVNHT extends from southwest Virginia and eastern Tennessee, tracing the route of American revolutionaries who gathered to defeat British loyalists at the Battle of Kings Mountain.

The park plans to extend its OVNHT segment from the Paddy’s Creek Area to the older Catawba River Area a few miles to the south. From there, it’ll connect to a planned Catawba River Greenway between



RANGER JAMIE CAMERON LEADS HOLLY DISCOVERY TRAIL EXPLORATION.

Morganton and Marion. At the other end, the OVNHT to the north, as a component of the National Park Service, promises access to public lands in the Linville Gorge.

The new trail segment, including two bridges, was built by park staff with the help of volunteers with strong support from the nonprofit Overmountain Victory Trail Association. Within the park, the OVNHT touches on the scenic Paddy’s Creek and sometimes follows the Lake James shoreline.

The three-quarter-mile Holly Discovery Trail is a new concept for the state parks system, bringing professionally

designed, interactive exhibits to the outdoors. It provides a great venue for rangers to give interpretive hikes, or visitors can explore it on their own. It features 18 stations, each with a unique activity.

For example, the “Something’s Rotten” exhibit invites visitors to see, feel and smell rotten logs and the plant life and critters that depend on them. A “Hiding Animal” station challenges visitors to spot likenesses of creatures in the brush and trees from a single vantage point.

The two-year project was designed and built entirely by state parks system staff.

RANGERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

wilderness camp and as a seasonal employee at Falls Lake State Recreation Area and William B. Umstead and Mount Mitchell state parks.

Rogers, who retired in April, served alongside Stubbs at South Mountains, coming to the park in 1984 and serving for four years as superintendent there (2001-05). He had earlier been posted at Lake Norman State Park.

Rogers, a native of Denton, graduated in 1983 with a degree in biology from Wake Forest University.

In the same week in late April, Bailey ended a long tenure at New River State Park. Also a native of the Triad (Greensboro), he graduated from East Carolina University in 1984 with a degree in parks, recreation and conservation.

Bailey worked seasonally with Greensboro parks and recreation, Fort Frederica National Monument and Goose Creek and Hanging Rock state parks before joining the state parks system fulltime in 1984 at Raven Rock State Park. He joined the staff at New River in 1988.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

APRIL, 2013

NC STATE PARK	April 2013	TOTAL YTD Apr-13	April 2012	TOTAL YTD Apr-12	% CHANGE (2013/2012) Apr YTD
Carolina Beach State Park	43,902	129,314	44,534	199,494	-1% -35%
Carvers Creek State Park	0	0	15	27	-100% -100%
Chimney Rock State Park	14,279	39,940	17,368	27,471	-18% 45%
Cliffs of the Neuse State Park	30,597	73,964	14,355	44,193	113% 67%
Crowders Mountain State Park	32,161	106,857	34,459	104,617	-7% 2%
Dismal Swamp State Park	14,319	37,095	7,854	23,803	82% 56%
Elk Knob State Park	2,041	3,829	1,962	8,345	4% -54%
Eno River State ParkYEMO including Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area	51,588	147,241	47,450	156,757	9% -6%
Falls Lake State Recreation Area	105,636	193,312	108,454	200,027	-3% -3%
Fort Fisher State Recreation Area	64,308	145,654	78,308	162,869	-18% -11%
Fort Macon State Park	101,860	253,338	124,314	286,756	-18% -12%
Goose Creek State Park	25,074	75,878	24,188	72,032	4% 5%
Gorges State Park	6,769	21,426	7,396	22,577	-8% -5%
Grandfather Mountain State Park	5,343	9,328	8,302	15,806	-36% -41%
Hammocks Beach State Park	10,005	27,037	11,281	30,333	-11% -11%
Haw River State Park	2,668	7,348	3,733	9,687	-29% -24%
Hanging Rock State Park	38,472	86,867	45,344	110,916	-15% -22%
Jones Lake State Park	11,836	32,078	8,382	27,977	41% 15%
Jordan Lake State Recreation Area	105,907	182,026	120,943	235,026	-12% -23%
Jockey's Ridge State Park	95,441	213,518	90,766	172,636	5% 24%
Kerr Lake State Recreation Area	73,138	186,899	88,476	227,624	-17% -18%
Lake James State Park	29,238	73,390	33,361	101,527	-12% -27%
Lake Norman State Park	26,997	90,786	49,044	143,349	-45% -37%
Lake Waccamaw State Park	15,838	44,042	15,138	36,183	5% 22%
Lumber River State Park	5,804	13,120	5,456	15,493	6% -15%
Mayo River State Park	3,612	7,796	3,497	11,663	3% -33%
Merchants Millpond State Park	27,325	72,668	33,996	113,978	-20% -36%
Medoc Mountain State Park	10,416	29,448	14,672	27,084	-29% 9%
Mount Mitchell State Park	7,119	9,703	19,324	32,929	-63% -71%
Morrow Mountain State Park	33,864	89,722	46,694	102,145	-27% -12%
New River State ParkYEMO including Mount Jefferson State Natural Area	18,342	48,176	18,796	48,287	-2% -0%
Pettigrew State Park	7,004	21,349	7,904	19,597	-11% 9%
Pilot Mountain State Park	38,109	115,963	45,005	111,661	-15% 4%
Raven Rock State Park	21,604	62,834	21,190	55,425	2% 13%
Singletary Lake State Park	1,489	4,371	1,573	5,975	-5% -27%
South Mountains State Park	20,694	52,724	21,000	55,420	-1% -5%
Stone Mountain State Park	32,484	78,302	28,542	69,986	14% 12%
Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve	5,486	20,650	4,864	18,646	13% 11%
William B. Umstead State Park	121,613	363,518	109,816	339,219	11% 7%
SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL	1,262,382	3,171,511	1,367,766	3,446,540	-8% -8%



Our Mission Remains...

to protect North Carolina's natural diversity;
to provide and promote outdoor recreation
opportunities throughout North Carolina;
to exemplify and encourage good stewardship
of North Carolina's natural resources for all
citizens and visitors.

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SAFETY ZONE

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR TICK SEASON

- ✓ Use a repellent with DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Wear long sleeves and long pants in the woods.
- ✓ Check yourself at least every six hours when outdoors. Pay particular attention to the nape of the neck and behind ears.
- ✓ To remove ticks, use fine-tipped tweezers, getting as far forward near the tick's head as possible.
- ✓ If you have any symptoms of tick-borne disease in the month following a tick bite, seek medical attention.

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